

REMARKS

This application has been carefully reviewed in light of the Office Action dated April 6, 2004 (Paper No. 25). Claims 66, 68 and 70 are pending in the application, all of which are in independent form, and all of which have been amended.

Reconsideration and further examination are respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, Claims 66, 68 and 70 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 6,324,521 (Shiota). Reconsideration and withdrawal of the rejection are respectfully requested.

The present invention generally concerns providing a plurality of services over a network. A request is transmitted by a user terminal for printing an image stored on the network to a service center. Among its many features, the present invention provides for (i) storing items and their prices in a first table, (ii) storing a plurality of service providers and at least one item included in each printing type provided by each of the plurality of service providers, in a second table, (iii) updating the prices of the items in the first table, and (iv) calculating a charge related to the request on the basis of referring to the updated first table and the second table.

By storing items and their prices in a first table, and the plurality of service providers and at least one item included in each printing type in a second table, management of accounting information is made more flexible, even in the case where the plurality of service providers have different price rules.

Referring specifically to claim language, independent Claim 66 as amended is directed to a method of providing a plurality of services over a network. The method includes the step of transmitting, by a user terminal, a request for printing an image stored

on the network to a service center. The method also includes the steps of storing, by the service center, items and their prices in a first table, and storing, by the service center, a plurality of service providers and at least one item included in each printing type provided by each of the plurality of service providers, in a second table. In addition, the method includes the steps of updating, by the service center, the prices of the items in the first table, and calculating, by the service center, a charge related to the request on the basis of referring to the updated first table and the second table. The method also includes the step of sending a notification of the calculated charge from the service center to the user terminal, forwarding the request from the user terminal to one of the plurality of service providers via the network automatically upon receipt by the service center of an instruction from the user terminal of whether to print, the instruction being responsive to the notification sent to the user terminal of the charge, and performing, by the one of the plurality of service providers, printing of the image according to the request received from the service center.

In a similar manner, independent Claim 68 as amended is directed to a system.

Independent Claim 70 as amended is directed to a service center apparatus for managing a plurality of services provided over a network. The apparatus includes reception means for receiving a request for printing an image stored on the network, from a user terminal via the network. The apparatus also includes first storage means for storing items and their prices, and second storage means for storing a plurality of service providers and at least one item included in each printing type provided by each of the plurality of service providers. In addition the apparatus includes updating means for updating the

prices of the items in the first table, and calculation means for calculating a charge related to the request on the basis of referring to the updated first storage means and the second storage means. The apparatus also includes notification means for sending a notification of the calculated charge to the user terminal, and transmission means for transmitting the request to one of the plurality of service providers via the network automatically upon receipt of an instruction from the user terminal of whether to print, the instruction being responsive to the notification sent to the user terminal of the charge.

The applied art is not seen to disclose or suggest the features of the invention of the present invention. In particular, the Shiota patent is not seen to disclose or suggest at least the features of (i) storing items and their prices in a first table, (ii) storing a plurality of service providers and at least one item included in each printing type provided by each of the plurality of service providers, in a second table, (iii) updating the prices of the items in the first table, and (iv) calculating a charge related to the request on the basis of referring to the updated first table and the second table.

As understood by Applicants, Shiota discloses a network photographic service which uses a service center. A center server in the service center selects and assigns a laboratory for printing an ordered picture in response to an order information transferred from a customer via a network, so that printing processing can be carried out by the laboratory specified by the customer instead of the center server. See Shiota, Abstract; column 7, lines 3 to 45; and Figure 1.

Without citing any particular passage of Shiota, page 3 of the Office Action asserts that Shiota discloses storing items and their prices in a first table, storing a plurality of service providers and at least one item included in each printing type provided by each

of the plurality of service providers in a second table, and calculating a charge by referring to the first and second tables. Applicants respectfully disagree with this assertion.

As described at lines 28 to 33 of column 9 of Shiota, when the center server transmits the order information to the selected laboratory, it records the content of the order and calculates a data storage fee, a communication charge and the like to be paid to each laboratory by periodically summing up the amount of data transferred. Although Shiota calculates such fees, it is not seen to teach where the items, fees, and service providers are stored. This is different than the present invention, in which items and their prices are stored in a first table, and in which a plurality of service providers and at least one item included in each printing type provided by each of the plurality of service providers, are stored in a second table.

In addition, since Shiota does not disclose using first and second tables for storage, Shiota could not possibly describe updating the prices of the items in the first table, and calculating a charge related to the request on the basis of referring to the updated first table and the second table.

Accordingly, based on the foregoing amendments and remarks, independent Claims 66, 68 and 70 as amended are believed to be allowable over the applied reference.

No other matters being raised, it is believed that the entire application is fully in condition for allowance, and such action is courteously solicited.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Costa Mesa, California office at (714) 540-8700. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below-listed address.

Respectfully submitted,


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